

# The overlooked collection of Ludwig Kaiser and a little-known report on birds of Nauru

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Nauru (00°32'S, 166°56'E) is a small (21 km<sup>2</sup>) single-island republic in the west-central Pacific Ocean, c.2,100 km north-east of New Guinea. Banaba (Ocean Island) is its nearest neighbour, c.300 km to the east. A 100–300 m wide coastal belt, where most of the c.10,000 islanders reside, abuts a scarp that rises to a max. 72 m on the central plateau. Coastal vegetation consists largely of strand, ruderal weeds and shrubs, ornamentals, and scattered coconut *Cocos nucifera* and fruit trees. More than 100 years of continuous phosphate mining has eliminated much of the plateau's original forest, leaving just remnants, mainly along the edges and slopes of the scarp. The interior is largely a regenerating scrubland within a skeletal framework of coral pinnacles 4–8 m high, from around which the soil and phosphate deposits have been excavated.

The avifauna of Nauru has received scant attention over the past nearly 130 years since Otto Finsch reported the five species he observed on 24 July 1880 (Finsch 1881). Pearson (1962) recorded at least 16 species over a period of six months in 1961, and he stated that Finsch's work comprised 'the only previous ornithological literature available concerning Nauru'. King (1967) and Garnett (1984) merged seabird records from Nauru with those from the Gilbert Islands (Kiribati), without stating which may have pertained only to the Gilberts. More recent checklists of Nauru birds (e.g. Owen 1977, Pratt *et al.* 1987, Cain *et al.* 1997) cite Pearson (1962) as a primary reference. However, none of these mentions an article that appeared in the notes section of volume 2 of the *Journal für Ornithologie* describing a collection of birds from Nauru made by Ludwig Kaiser in 1900, nor is this article mentioned in either of the two bibliographies of Nauru (Krauss 1970, Pollock 1994).

Ludwig Kaiser, born 21 March 1862 in Obergebisbach, Germany, held several different administrative positions in the German Marshall Islands at different times between 1889 and 1906—Deputy Landeshauptmann (Deputy Chief of Administration) in Jaluit, 1889–92; Stationsleiter (Station Chief) in the Protectorate of Nauru, 1899–1905?; and Acting Landeshauptmann in Jaluit in 1906 until his suicide later that year (Spennemann 1999–2000). Kaiser's Nauru collection (16 specimens of 12 species plus two skeletons, a nest, and two eggs of *Acrocephalus luscinius rehsei*) has been housed at the Museum für Naturkunde zu Berlin (ZMB) since it arrived in November 1901 via the Jaluit Corporation Hamburg and the Königliches Museum für Völkerkunde (Berlin). Kaiser apparently sent an accompanying annotated list that included measurements and colour notes of the specimens, as well as information concerning the status of the species on Nauru (breeder, non-breeder, captive). This list is not in the museum archives, and only the letter regarding delivery of the collection remains (ZMB archives, Zool. Mus. Sign. S III, Kaiser, L., p. 1). However, information from this list was published in the *Journal für Ornithologie* as a contribution to the meeting of the board of the German Ornithological Society, in January 1902 in Berlin, written by Paul Matschie.

Given the scarcity of information on the birds of Nauru, the obscure nature of the Kaiser publication, and the overall paucity of museum specimens from the island, we list here all of the specimens in this collection, with updated taxonomy following the nomenclature of Dickinson (2003), along with pertinent data from original specimen labels.

Additional information contributed by the authors is enclosed in brackets. Measurements are reported for selected specimens if important for species determination. They were taken from the label or directly from the skins (given in brackets) by one of us (SF).

### Procellariidae

**Audubon's Shearwater** *Puffinus lherminieri*.—ZMB 2000.3375 (coll. no. 10), 5 March 1900. Kaiser (1902) stated that the species nests in deep rock holes and crevices, but did not explicitly indicate that it breeds on Nauru. Murphy (1927) remarked on having examined specimens of *P. lherminieri* in the Berlin Museum from Nauru and the Palau Islands. His Nauru material probably was confined to the specimen collected by Kaiser, which still appears to be the only specimen record of Audubon's Shearwater from Nauru.

### Fregatidae

**Lesser Frigatebird** *Fregata ariel*.—ZMB 2000.2891 (coll. no. 1), 15 February 1900 [immature], apparently male; ZMB 2000.2890 (coll. no. 2), 15 February 1900 [immature]; ZMB 2000.2892 (coll. no. 3), 20 February 1900 [adult], male; noted on the label as having been kept in captivity for several months, and in having the naked skin (presumably referring to the gular pouch) 'blood red'. Kaiser (1902) remarked that the species does not breed on Nauru and that it arrives as singles or in small groups attracted by tamed birds.

### Sulidae

**Red-footed Booby** *Sula sula*.—ZMB 2000.8517 (coll. no. 5), 3 March 1900 [juvenile], apparently male, feet grey. The only documented record of Red-footed Booby from Nauru. Kaiser (1902) wrote that lone birds were seen occasionally and were easy to catch by hand, though whether he was referring solely to that he collected or to others as well is unclear.

### Charadriidae

**Pacific Golden Plover** *Pluvialis fulva*.—ZMB 2000.9504 (coll. no. 9d), 30 July 1900, female.

### Scolopacidae

**Whimbrel** *Numenius phaeopus*.—ZMB 2000.8515 (coll. no. 9e), 30 July 1900, male. Kaiser (1902) indicated that it occurs on Nauru occasionally, and that he saw another 'Strandschnepfe' (possibly a *Limosa*), similar to *N. phaeopus* but with a straight bill, which he was unable to collect.

**Wandering Tattler** *Heteroscelus incanus*.—ZMB 2000.9508 (coll. no. 9c), 4 March 1900.

**Ruddy Turnstone** *Arenaria interpres*.—ZMB 2000.9506 (coll. no. 9a), 3 March 1900, female; ZMB 2000.9507 (coll. no. 9b), 3 March 1900.

### Laridae

**Greater Crested Tern** *Sterna bergii*.—ZMB 2000.9509 (coll. no. 4), 1 March 1900 [immature], male, feet brown. The only documented record of *S. bergii* from Nauru. Kaiser (1902) recorded it as *S. media* (= *S. bengalensis* Lesser Crested Tern), but specimen comparison at the Museum für Naturkunde reveals that it was misidentified. Kaiser (1902) wrote that the species occurs very seldom on Nauru, and the birds are solitary. Measurements: total length 490 mm, [wing 323 mm (max. chord), bill 51 mm].

**Brown Noddy** *Anous stolidus*.—ZMB 2000.9510 (coll. no. 7), 3 March 1900, female. Kaiser (1902) stated that it breeds in large numbers on Nauru.

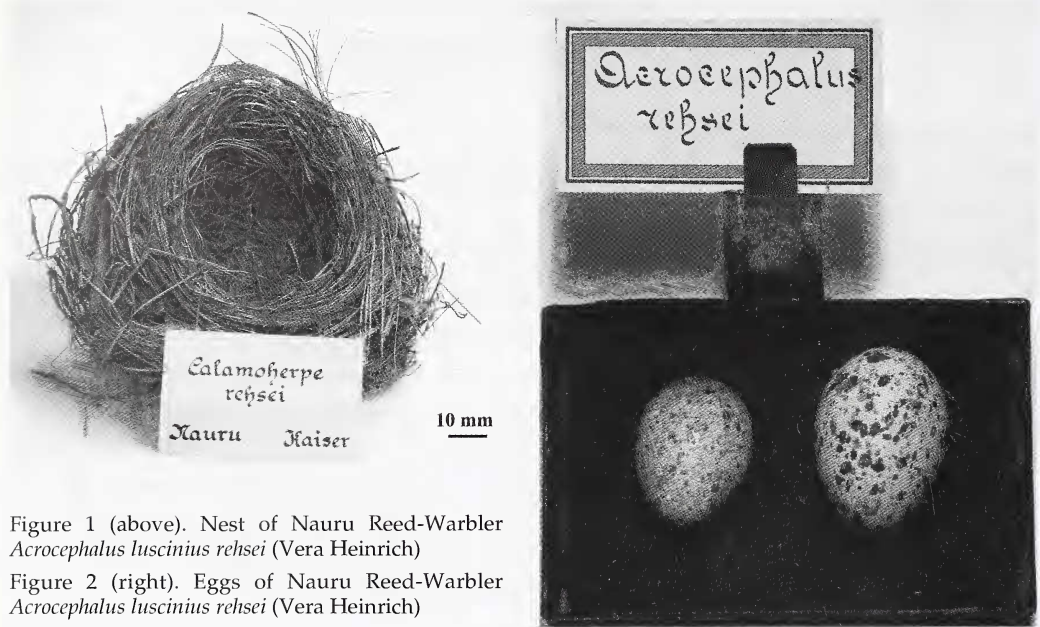


Figure 1 (above). Nest of Nauru Reed-Warbler *Acrocephalus luscinius rehsei* (Vera Heinrich)

Figure 2 (right). Eggs of Nauru Reed-Warbler *Acrocephalus luscinius rehsei* (Vera Heinrich)

**Black Noddy** *Anous minutus*.—ZMB 2000.9511 (coll. no. 8), 3 March 1900. Kaiser (1902) stated that it breeds in large numbers on Nauru.

**White Tern** *Gygis alba*.—ZMB 2000.9512 (coll. no. 6), 3 March 1900; specimen obtained from captivity (Kaiser 1902).

### Sylviidae

**Nauru Reed-Warbler** *Acrocephalus luscinius rehsei* [following Dickinson (2003), although most authors treat Nauru Reed-Warbler as a species endemic to Nauru].—ZMB 2000.3199 (coll. no. 11), 30 April 1900; ZMB 2000.3374 (coll. no. 11), 30 April 1900. Kaiser's (1902) report mentioned only one skin of Nauru Reed-Warbler, but the collection includes two. Only one bears an original (collector's) label, but both possess the same information on their museum labels, including the same field collection number. Given that 16 birds are mentioned in the original packing list, there is no doubt that both belong to the Kaiser collection. The packing list for the collection also mentions two skeletons, a nest and two eggs of Nauru Reed-Warbler. The skeletons were collected on 4 March 1900 and both are catalogued o/2266. The museum has two nests of *A. l. rehsei*. One is labelled as from the Kaiser collection (ZMB 2000.10012; Fig. 1) and the other is unlabelled, with no indication of provenance. The museum egg collection includes three eggs, one belonging to the Adolph Nehr Korn collection, whilst of the others (Fig. 2), one is recorded in the egg catalogue as ZMB 10346, but without any collection data. One or both eggs may belong to the Kaiser collection, but corroborating documentation is lacking.

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## First records of Yellow-cheeked Becard *Pachyramphus xanthogenys* for Brazil, with comments on the validity of *P. x. peruanus*

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Yellow-cheeked Becard *Pachyramphus xanthogenys* occurs predominantly on the east slope of the Andes, in eastern Ecuador and central and south-east Peru, usually at 650–1,700 m (Mobley 2004). *P. xanthogenys* was formerly considered conspecific with the more widespread Green-backed Becard *P. viridis* (e.g. Traylor 1979), but Ridgely & Tudor (1994) treated it specifically, based on plumage and habitat differences, and geographical disjunction. Subsequent authors have been divided in their treatment of *xanthogenys*: Ridgely & Greenfield (2001) and Mobley (2004) treat it as a species, whereas others (e.g. Schulenberg *et al.* 2007) retain it as a race of *P. viridis*, pending a published analysis of the complex. When treated specifically, *P. xanthogenys* is considered to comprise two allopatric subspecies: *P. x. xanthogenys* Salvadori & Festa, 1898, in eastern Ecuador and northern Peru; and *P. xanthogenys peruanus* Hartert & Goodson, 1917, in central and south-east Peru (Mobley 2004). Because the holotype of *P. x. peruanus* is a female with supposed signs of immaturity (Hartert & Goodson 1917), the validity of this taxon has been considered uncertain (Mobley 2004).

On 25 August 2005, AA mist-netted and collected an adult male *P. xanthogenys* in breeding condition (left testis 9 × 5 mm; deposited at Museu Paraense Emílio Goeldi, Belém,